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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 004681

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ARN, NEA/NGA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/13/2013

TAGS: PREL SY IS TU KU

SUBJECT: (C) SYRIA: GOK TO HOST BASHAR AFTER RAMADHAN

Classified By: AMB. RICHARD H. JONES; REASON 1.5 (B,D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The GOK is concerned that Bashar al-Asad lacks the power to remove his late father's old guard and adapt to the new regional reality. It expects him to visit after Ramadhan, and would be happy to pass on any messages. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) NEA PDAS Larocco called on Shaykh Sabah al-Khalid al-Hamad al-Sabah, Chairman of Kuwait's National Security Bureau, October 13, during a brief visit to Kuwait. This message reports what Shaykh Sabah al-Khalid (protect throughout) had to say about Syria (other topics septels).

¶3. (C) According to Shaykh Sabah al-Khalid, the GOK was livid at Syria's behavior in the lead-up to the aborted UNSCR on Iraq last spring. After the collapse of the Saddam regime in April, (then de-facto) Prime Minister Shaykh Sabah al-Ahmed al-Jaber al-Sabah went to Damascus and met with President Bashar al-Asad. With Syrian FM Farouq al-Shara present, Sabah al-Ahmed pointed at Shara and said "he is the architect of all your mistakes. Now it is in Syria's own hands to determine its future. Act swiftly before the window closes." Sabah al-Ahmed added that he had stood with Bashar's father as an ardent pan-Arabist, but those days were now gone, never to return. There was a new reality in the region, and Syria needed to recognize that, for its own interests. Bashar replied that Syria had made great mistakes before the invasion of Iraq, but was now under new pressures, with US troops on the border, conflict with Israel still plaguing it, and Turkey causing problems. He felt hemmed in. Sabah al-Ahmed agreed, but advised him not to look to others for solutions; Bashar could solve his problems by his own actions. The Kuwaiti came away unconvinced that Bashar had understood.

¶4. (C) On the eve of (now de-jure) Prime Minister Sabah al-Ahmed's September trip to Washington, Shara had come to Kuwait for a couple of hours. He had whined on and on about Syria's problems, saying the US misunderstood: the Syrians were cooperating, but the US was asking too much. The PM retorted that Shara did not understand reality: he (Shara) was the problem, and had no hope of a solution. He needed to change his approach completely, because time was running out.

¶5. (C) Sabah al-Khalid remarked to PDAS Larocco that the Kuwaiti leadership had held great hope that Bashar's Cabinet reshuffle last month would get rid of Shara. The fact that he remained in the Cabinet indicated to the Kuwaitis that Bashar was too weak to make the needed changes. He needed to remove the old guard, but apparently could not. The Kuwaitis were very concerned about Syria's future actions. Right after the Israeli air strike in Syria last week, the GOK had sent Bashar a message: be careful, do nothing rash. The Kuwaitis intended to remain engaged with Damascus, out of necessity. It was a sad commentary that Shara had felt the need to come to a small, weak country like Kuwait the way he had: that showed how weak the Syrian leadership had become. Bashar had accepted Kuwait's invitation to make a full two-day visit after Ramadhan. The GOK would be happy to pass on any messages.

¶6. (U) Ambassador Larocco was the source of this message, but did not have time to clear the cable itself.

¶7. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.  
JONES